

“It Throws you into the Ring”: Learning from Live-Tweeting

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This study examines the use of live-tweeting as a required class assignment in three mass communication courses. The authors integrated live-tweeting of major events (e.g., Olympic Games, Academy Awards, March Madness) into the courses and surveyed students across multiple semesters to discover what they learned from the experience. Students said they learned to think quickly, write concisely and present themselves professionally. They also appreciated the opportunity to build their network on Twitter and to observe others' tweets.

Twitter Background

Twitter marked its 9th anniversary in 2015. The service has more than 288 million active users who send more than 400 million messages a day (Isaac, 2015). Developed in 2006, founders Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, and Biz Stone created this microblogging site. By 2010, it was described as a legitimate form of communication (Silverblatt, 2010) and as a public relations tool with an ideal global reach (Evans, Twomey, & Talan, 2011).

The 140-character limit, the app development, and the supporting apps have prompted explosive growth in Twitter via mobile. This mobile element led to the popularity of live-tweeting, which is designed to capture what is happening at a face-to-face experience or a media event. According to CNN's Brandon Griggs and

Heather Kelly (2013), “Twitter has become a digital watercooler of sorts for global conversations around live TV events such as elections, the Oscars or the Super Bowl” (p. 1). Many businesses want to be part of that “watercooler” conversation, which no longer has to wait until the next morning but can start in real-time.

Connection to Public Relations

Uses of social media by individuals, businesses, brands and organizations for public relations purposes has become common. Because 42 percent of Twitter users follow various brands or companies, it is an ideal forum to connect to many groups' publics (Luttrell, 2015). According to Wright and Hinson (2014), Twitter use in public relations is increasing: “For the first time since we began asking the question in 2010,

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Twitter replaced Facebook as the most frequently accessed new medium for public relations activities” (p. 11).

The social media strategy for each brand varies depending on the organizational goals and outcomes (Luttrell, 2015), but the uses follow many of the traditional public relations categories such as community relations, media relations, public affairs, investor relations, event management, and organization reputation. One of the strategies used by an increasing number of brands is to engage with stakeholders in real-time during events with large audiences. Being able to reach a large group at the same time has become more difficult with the changing trends in television and radio, but there are certain events that people want to watch live, not on their DVRs. Brands can reach those who are tuned in during that time slot through Twitter. A number of brands have tried to tie in to major events by using humorous tweets (e.g., Oreo, Arby’s, JCPenney). Priego says live-tweeting “should create positive opportunities. It’s all about engagement, community building, and widening participation” (2012, para. 13). These are key aspects of public relations programs, and thus suggest live-tweeting should be integrated within public relations and other communication courses to better prepare students for the field.

The goal of this research is to help confirm whether live-tweeting is a worthwhile investment of time and effort as part of the required aspects of a course. The following section will review previous studies regarding Twitter use for education and for public relations purposes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hands-on, professional skill-building exercises are needed within mass communication programs to prepare students for their careers. These skills range from news release writing to website creation. Previous research has examined how students can be trained to be better interviewers by using recordings to hear their own mistakes (Grunig, 1990); better spokespeople, reporters

and production crew by collaborating on live reporting scenarios with journalism, electronic medium and public relations majors (Carroll & Copeland, 1988); and better multimedia journalists by using iPads (Kraft & Seely, 2015).

One of the newest skill sets employers seek is social media acumen (Wenger & Owens, 2012). Educational uses of social media have been researched by several scholars (e.g., Bor, 2014; Davis III, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, & González Canché, 2012; McCorkindale, DiStaso, & Fussell Sisco, 2013; Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2010; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009; Santovec, 2006; Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2013) and reported on by others (e.g., Miners, 2009), but few peer-reviewed studies were found focused on the use of live-tweeting in the curriculum. Published research projects related to live-tweeting come from the fields of medicine (e.g., Djuricich & Zee-Cheng, 2015), science (e.g., Ekins & Perlstein, 2014; Shiffman, 2012) and politics (e.g., Houston, Hawthorne, Spialek, Greenwood & McKinney, 2013; Houston, McKinney, Hawthorne & Spialek, 2013). Some blog posts were also found related to the use of Twitter in class (e.g., Sample, 2010) and to the ethics of live-tweeting at academic conferences (e.g., Priego, 2012). Although live-tweeting has not been covered thoroughly in academic literature, several studies related to other uses of Twitter were located within the education arena.

Twitter and Education

Writing and critical thinking.

Kurtz (2009) used Twitter with his first and second graders to teach them writing, editing, and consideration of one’s audience. Kurtz (2009) said, “I love that character limit feature for teaching; it provides a real and powerful way, and need, to teach word choice, ideas and punctuation. Twitter also creates an authentic requirement to consider the needs and background of our audience” (p. 1). Through the Twitter project, Kurtz said his students “have been taught

that revising and editing are part of the process” (p. 2). Kurtz has his class tweet four or five times a day, which “embeds writing instruction all day long” (p. 2). While university classes do not last all day, this idea can be extrapolated to embedding writing instruction across the communication curriculum and into students’ daily lives.

Vázquez-Cano (2012) also studied the use of Twitter at school, but the focus and age group were different. Fifteen teachers at three high schools in Toledo, Spain, tested the use of Twitter in three courses: Spanish, social sciences, and natural sciences. They had 280 student participants aged 13-15. The researcher gathered information for five months through interviews, exam results, participant reflections, and observer field notes. A quasi-experiment was conducted with pre/post-tests given to the experimental group and the control group. According to Vázquez-Cano, the reading and writing skills of the participants improved after participating in the Twitter exercises. Assignments included a paradox of the day, haiku writing, microreviews of movies/books/music, inspirational quotes, daily word games, and the one most connected to the current study, “collaborative event watching” (p. 144). Vázquez-Cano (2012) points to Twitter as “a powerful communication tool for active learning in developing linguistic competence” (p. 145). Vázquez-Cano (2012) also suggests, “The use of digital media promotes personalized self-directed learning, which in turn contributes to enabling students to engage in lifelong learning” (p. 145).

Moody (2010) was one of the earlier academics to address social media use in the college communication classroom. According to Moody (2010), “Almost any course can benefit from having students practice critical thinking and writing skills by blogging” (p. 3). Thus, because Twitter is a microblogging site, it should be useful in any class by prompting students to think critically and practice their writing skills. Moody (2010) suggested using social media “exercises will help students become more media literate

so that when they graduate, they can apply lessons from social media on the job. Instructors who pique students’ interest by incorporating social media in the class have accomplished volumes” (p. 8). Other researchers have put Twitter engagement theories to the test.

Higher engagement.

Junco, Elavsky and Heiberger (2013) performed multiple experiments to test the use of Twitter in college classes looking for any impacts on engagement and grades. They also looked for what factors made the integration of Twitter the most effective. In their first study, they required Twitter to be used by half of a first-year seminar class and Ning (a social network creating tool) by the other half. The class was for pre-health-care professionals. None of the students had used Twitter before. In the end, the Twitter group had significantly higher engagement levels and GPAs. In their second study, Twitter use was optional. This second study showed no differences between Twitter users and non-users either in engagement or grades. The authors concluded:

When students are required to use Twitter for a course and faculty engage with them regularly on the platform, there is an increase in student engagement and grades that was not seen when students were allowed to choose whether or not to use Twitter and when faculty rarely interacted with them on the platform. (Junco et al., 2013, p. 283)

Perhaps this result of needed faculty interaction supports Marquardt’s (1999) model of action learning, which requires the presence of a facilitator or coach. According to Soffe, Marquardt, and Hale (2011), “the action learning coach helps the team members reflect both on what they are learning and how they are solving problems” (p. 221). Or perhaps it suggests students simply want to know someone is listening.

Real-world experience.

As part of her mobile reporting class, Jones (2015) analyzed her students' tweets and their changing social connections on Twitter during a breaking news story on campus. Jones (2015) sought to answer: "where does the content *go* in a network and *who* spreads it" (emphasis in original; p. 266). Jones' students found themselves in the midst of a national story because of a fraternity video with racist slurs that had gone viral. Using social network analysis, Jones examined how the class' Twitter connections were impacted during this week of breaking-news coverage. Jones found six groups emerged within the conversation connected to the class Twitter feed. Following Jones' instructions, each student would post breaking news on his/her own Twitter feed and tag the official class feed (OU NewsCrowd), then the student's post would be retweeted by the class Twitter account. According to Jones (2015), "findings suggest that the strategy allowed the students not only the opportunity to connect with others but also—for at least three of them—the chance to grow their own, unique social network" (p. 273). Because of Twitter, "Breaking news events present student journalists with a unique opportunity to report side-by-side with professional journalists under 'real world' conditions" (Jones, p. 273).

Reinforcement and co-constructed knowledge.

Another set of researchers, Hsu and Ching (2012), analyzed student tweets to examine the types of interactions students in an online course had on Twitter and how students benefitted from learning via Twitter outside the classroom. According to the authors, the goal "was to extend students' learning context from the content in class to their authentic real-life settings" (p. 215). The course was focused on instructional message design, so when students saw graphic design examples related to the class topic of the week, they were encouraged to post those images and to reply to at least two classmates' posts per week.

In addition to open coding and examining the distribution of the tweets, Hsu and Ching (2012) also sought student feedback through an online survey at the end of the semester, similar to the current study method. The researchers wanted to know if the Twitter activity impacted students' feelings of involvement, as well as what they liked and disliked about the activities. The students shared overall positive responses to the assignment and mentioned that it created more of a community within the class. The researchers said one of the benefits was "reinforcing formal learning with informal learning" (p. 223) and that students "co-construct[ed] knowledge through their exchange of tweets" (p. 224).

Sensemaking

Weick's (1995) theory of sensemaking ties in beautifully to these ideas of co-construction of knowledge and critical thinking taking place as students plan and write their tweets. Weick listed seven characteristics of the process of sensemaking: "1. Grounded in identity construction, 2. Retrospective, 3. Enactive of sensible environments, 4. Social, 5. Ongoing, 6. Focused on and by extracted cues, 7. Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy" (p. 17). The authors of the current research project propose that these characteristics align well with what happens in the creation of content for social media. Weick (1995) describes how:

Identities are constituted out of the process of interaction. To shift among interactions is to shift among definitions of self. Thus the sensemaker is himself or herself an ongoing puzzle undergoing continual redefinition, coincident with presenting some self to others and trying to decide which self is appropriate. (p. 20)

This idea of the appropriate self is particularly the case as professors advise students to be cognizant of the personal brand they are building online.

Weick's theory says we look back to "make sense of our environment," which fits with the reflection expected to take place in critical thinking (Soffe et al., 2011, p. 219). According to Soffe et al. (2011), "the social property of sense-making . . . contends that an individual's sense-making is always influenced by others, either by imagined or actual interaction" (p. 219). Social media's focus is engagement between followers and friends. Sometimes, based on parasocial interaction theory (Labrecque, 2014), people may imagine an interaction as they read a celebrity's Twitter feed. Per Weick (1995), what others do or say (or what we predict they would do or say) impacts our actions. The cues mentioned in the list are also vital to critical thinking. People using social media pick up cues of what is acceptable and expected of them by watching what others post.

Experiential Learning & PR

In the 1950s, medical schools instituted Problem-Based Learning (PBL) where students were required to grapple with complex issues and solve real problems on their own. McCain and Miller (2013) say PBL gave the students "a memorable context for learning not only the primary subject matter, but also a range of 'soft' skills, such as research, teamwork and written and oral communication" (p. 5). Medical students are not the only ones who can benefit from being dropped into a situation and having to figure their way out.

The need to put textbook learning into practice is common across many industries. Public relations, and other communication majors, generally require experiential learning through internships and class projects that often include real clients (e.g., Wilson, 2012). These could certainly fall under the PBL category described by McCain and Miller (2013). Many Public Relations Student Society of America members get the chance to compete with campaign work for real clients through the Bateman Competition or have the opportunity to work with clients

through a student-run agency. Some public relations programs also offer PR campaigns courses with actual clients attached. These hands-on, real-world situations offer PR students the chance for active learning and critical thinking. Anderson and Swenson (2013) said there is "no substitute for hands-on practice" (p. 3). With this thought in mind, the authors of the current study required their students to move beyond the study of social media into the practice of crafting real-time effective social media posts, specifically on Twitter for major live events.

Industry Trends

Social media use.

Social media management has become a key element of public relations work. According to Swerling (2014), "the use of Twitter as a corporate communication platform has grown dramatically" (para. 6). For example:

During the Seahawks' playoff run and Super Bowl XLVIII appearance, Edelman Digital helped the Seahawks' internal community management team drive an 804 percent increase in overall engagement on Twitter and a 512 percent increase in outgoing responses to community members. (Edelman, n.d., para. 6)

The Edelman team "sift[ed] through a high volume of social media engagements on a daily basis, and partnered with the Seahawks' in-house team to identify and interact with excited and engaged fans" (para. 2). While some work like this campaign spans weeks or months, there are points on the calendar when a particular event takes over Twitter. These major events have led to large numbers of people live-tweeting to experience the event together.

Live tweeting.

Live-tweeting events has become commonplace for brands (e.g., Delo, 2014; Kantrowitz,

2014). From Oreo's "You can still dunk in the dark" during Super Bowl XLVII to Ellen's Samsung selfie on the 2014 Academy Awards, many brands have hit the jackpot by engaging in live-tweeting. In addition to sporting events and award programs, certain television series' original broadcasts have also become popular occasions for live-tweeting. According to Adashek (2014), the most tweeted scripted television show in 2014 was AMC's "The Walking Dead;" the most tweeted special television program was the Oscars; and the most tweeted sporting event was the Super Bowl. From hashtags on the screen to cast members live-tweeting alongside the fans, television networks have integrated live-tweeting into their programming to increase the audience size during the original airing of a show. According to Midha (2014), "Across all genres, having a cast live-Tweet led to the biggest increase in follower growth (versus a show's official handle)" (para. 6).

Organizations desperately want to be favored and retweeted and to become nationwide trending topics, and large, live events have given them that opportunity. For example, though the Tribeca Film Festival is small in comparison to the Super Bowl, it garners a lot of attention. Edelman used live-tweeting to promote its client Hilton's Conrad "Pop-up Concierge" as a sponsor of the Tribeca Film Festival in 2012 (Edelman Digital, 2012). By following the hashtag for the event, agency personnel were able to interact with those stakeholders and give surprise gifts to them as they stood in line for a film. Edelman has social media monitoring space in its Chicago office called the Social Intelligence Command Center (SICC). For the Tribeca Film Festival, one team was in the SICC and another was on the ground in New York. In the SICC, practitioners go through the steps of listening, creating content, publishing content, amplifying those posts, and then monitoring and measuring the results (Edelman Digital, 2012).

In addition to hooking onto a popular live event that already exists, organizations are

live-tweeting their own events. According to HJMT Public Relations (2012), "Live tweeting during your event gives you an opportunity to increase your visibility and update your followers on the event developments. This method of continuous, focused tweeting has shown to greatly increase engagement, such as mentions and retweets" (para. 3). Besides commercial brands seeking to connect with viewers of sporting events and award shows, live-tweeting takes place during political events (e.g., Covington, 2015), conventions (e.g., Albert, 2015; Welsh, 2015) and conferences (e.g., Priego, 2012).

Because of the need for experiential learning, the opportunity for critical thinking, and the clear industry trends showing Twitter use as a key public relations strategy, the researchers asked the following questions:

- RQ1.** Can live-tweeting be successfully integrated into a communication course?
- RQ2.** What will students learn from live-tweeting assignments?
- RQ3.** What are the best practices for live-tweeting in a course?

METHOD

Subjects

Participants were undergraduate students in three communication courses (i.e., New Media, Media Writing, PR Copywriting) in spring 2014 ($n = 59$), May intersession 2014 ($n = 9$) and spring 2015 ($n = 68$) at a southwestern U.S. university. Participants tended to be upper-level students (38% seniors, 31% juniors, 20% sophomores and 11% freshmen). The most common majors included Advertising/Public Relations (36%), Broadcasting/Electronic Media (22%), and Agricultural Media and Communication (18%). Similar to the public relations field, 72% of the respondents were female, and 28% were male.

Procedure

Assignments were given requiring students to live-tweet particular events. Some of the events were televised (e.g., Super Bowl, Academy Awards, March Madness, 2014 Winter Olympics) while others were in person (e.g., keynote speakers on campus, department events). The basic assignment was to watch at least 30 minutes of a certain program/event and to tweet using the class hashtag at least three times for the writing courses (see Appendix B) and five times in that period for the New Media class (see Appendix C). Professors followed the class hashtag and used a Twitter list for students in the course, and New Media students created Storify accounts of their tweets to assemble them for easier grading.

In preparation for the assignment, pre-event research was discussed in class. For example, students were told to search online for the hashtags that were likely to be used or that had been used in the past for similar events. Suggestions also were made to investigate the brands previewing content or sponsoring the event, important players/actors/speakers, and their Twitter handles and hashtags.

For the lower-level, introductory writing course, a practice session was undertaken. During the writing class, students watched a short video of an upcoming campus speaker and wrote practice tweets in a Word document during the video. After the five-minute video, students read and discussed their practice tweets, hashtags and any brands or handles they planned to include.

After the students participated in live-tweeting events several times for class, a Qualtrics survey was distributed to students through the online classroom management tool (e.g., Blackboard; see Appendix A). Participation in live-tweeting was required for the classes, but sharing their feedback was voluntary. Survey results were recorded anonymously.

RESULTS

Students completed a survey on Qualtrics after completing live-tweeting exercises in class

in spring and May 2014 and spring 2015. Their responses on the objective questions were evaluated within Qualtrics, both descriptive data and cross tabs, and through open coding by both researchers on the open-ended questions.

RQ2: Learning from Live-Tweeting

When asked what they learned from live-tweeting, the most commonly referenced theme that emerged during open-coding related to time. One student reported learning “how quickly one has to get the information out or it becomes irrelevant,” and another said, “how to think on my feet and be concise with the tweets.” Often their reference to the demand for speed was partnered with the challenge of meeting the character limit. One student learned “how to communicate with the world with limited space and time.”

The second most common theme related to professionalism. One student explained, “I learned that there is such a thing as ‘professional tweeting,’ before this class I thought tweeter [sic] was just a place for people to complain about companies or happenings.” Another student said, “It helped me realize how useful twitter [sic] can be in the real world. It’s not just for teenagers expressing their feelings.”

A number of students mentioned they learned the challenges of live-tweeting. For them, those challenges included having to “have your ears wide open and your fingers prepared to type fast.” Another mentioned the challenge of content creation. That student said, “sometimes it is very hard to come up with something to say.” According to another participant, “it’s a lot harder than you think.” As mentioned above, one of those challenges was keeping tweets short. One respondent said, “Live tweeting speakers or other events makes you think about what is important and be straight and to the point rather than tweet about the things that don’t matter and aren’t going to catch people’s attention.”

Help with skills.

When asked what skills live-tweeting helped with (if any), students were allowed to check any of the choices that applied. Overall ($n = 133$), the most commonly selected choice was “thinking on my feet” (74%), followed by “being concise (52%), “networking” (48%), “writing” (39%), “branding myself” (37%), “editing” (26%) and “other” (4%), which included “wit” and “using twitter [sic].”

Twitter use beneficial in class.

With 0 meaning “not at all” and 10 meaning “very beneficial,” students were asked how beneficial Twitter was in class. The overall mean was 6.36 ($n = 134$, $SD = 2.85$). The overall mode was 10 (20%). For the 48 advertising/public relations majors who responded to this question, the mean was 7. The most commonly selected answer for advertising/PR majors was 10, or “very beneficial” (31.25%). It was also the mode for the journalism and electronic media students, but not for the agricultural communication students whose mode was 6 and mean was 5.35 ($n = 23$).

Live tweeting beneficial to career.

With 0 meaning “not at all” and 10 meaning “very beneficial,” students were asked how beneficial live-tweeting was for their career goals. The mean was 5.85 ($n = 136$, $SD = 3.31$). The mode was 10 (21%). For the 49 advertising/public relations majors who responded to the question, the mean was 6.69, with 32.65% of them answering 10. Ten was the mode for not only the advertising/public relations students, but also for the journalism and electronic media students. Where the mode differed was with the agricultural communication students, again, who had a mode of 5 and mean of 5.08.

Most helpful aspect of Twitter use.

Through open-coding of the responses to the question “What was the most helpful aspect of our use of Twitter in class?”, the following themes emerged. Students mentioned that Twitter use in

class allowed them to learn how to manage social media professionally. One student said, “I always knew you could use it professionally, but I didn’t know how much it could help. I got an internship.” Another student replied, “It familiarized me with the professional side of Twitter, and it got me interacting with people in my field of study.” One participant said, “It throws you into the ring and gets you ready.”

Numerous students pointed to the value of communicating and networking with others through Twitter. One student commented, “Twitter allowed my name to be known by people who are in the profession that I would like to pursue, as well as observing their profile and possibly creating contact.” One participant said, “The skills I’ve learned with Twitter in our class will help me to continue to brand myself and network online in a professional and efficient way.”

Students said it was useful to learn something new. One respondent said, “I had never tweeted and had no idea what a powerful tool it is.” Another student said, “I was new to Twitter so . . . everything I learned was very helpful. I really appreciate that I started off Twitter with professional tweets.” A student said the projects, in addition to being on a new platform, “introduced me to a new way of thinking. . . It helped me by forcing me to step out of my comfort zone and made me think on my feet and think in a way I never thought before.”

Students said Twitter use in class also helped them stay up-to-date. One participant said, “It definitely made students be more aware of what was going on around them and stay up to date on current events.”

The final top theme from this question related to time. According to one student, “The most helpful aspect of our use of twitter [sic] was live Tweeting [sic]. It required me to think on my feet and react quickly.” Another said, “It helped me to think on the spot of things that would interest my followers.”

Favorite part of live-tweeting.

The chance to read what other people tweeted was the most commonly mentioned aspect of live-tweeting that students reported as their favorite. One student said, "Seeing what other people said about the same subject. People tweet what is in their head so it's like seeing what they think." Another participant said, "My favorite part was just seeing people's reactions to the same event we were tweeting about." Related to that, they also appreciated the chance to interact with their classmates and with other people using the same hashtag. One described live-tweeting as "opening up that gateway for interaction and discussion." One said his/her favorite part was "when random strangers would retweet or follow me!" Several of them mentioned the community that is built among those live-tweeting during the same event. One person said, "Its [sic] like were [sic] all connected and watching an event together." Another theme that emerged was the enjoyment in learning. A student replied, "I enjoyed that this was an engaging assignment." Another said, "I got to tweet with other people in real time and have some fun earning class credit." Other students mentioned appreciating the challenge and exhilaration. One student said his/her favorite part was "the excitement and adrenaline rush of trying to tweet so vigorously."

RQ3: Best Practices for Live-Tweeting

Suggestions for future live-tweeting.

In addition to asking what students learned from the experience, the researchers gave students the chance to make suggestions for future classes. The most common response was along the lines of "Nothing! It was great!" Others made suggestions, such as offering more choices for events to live-tweet so that students could pick events that interested them and so they could better work around incompatible schedules. In addition to having conflicting work schedules during the events, a few faced the challenge of having no television at home. Surprisingly, some suggested

extending the required viewing time and minimum number of tweets. Another teaching suggestion was to share examples from previous students and more detailed expectations.

There were a few individual suggestions that did not fit a theme that emerged, but they expressed interesting ideas that could be used in the future. One suggested requiring a certain number of favorites or retweets to measure their influence, though this would likely be manipulated for a grade rather than be organic. One suggested practicing before doing the live-tweeting by themselves, which was done in the introductory writing class and could be expanded. One suggested providing a place to live tweet or doing it during class. Another respondent suggested discussing and researching the top tweets and what "makes them so engaging."

DISCUSSION

The researchers' first question was whether live-tweeting can be successfully integrated into a communication course. After several semesters of testing this question, the answer appears clearly positive. Students said they learned important lessons from the live-tweeting experiences and also enjoyed the work. Bill Goodwyn, CEO of Discovery Education (as cited by Edelman, 2015) said:

We have to do a better job of capturing students' attention in the classroom. Because young people are familiar with digital content and use it so often in their daily lives, it's a fantastic medium through which to engage them in classroom instruction. (para. 3)

Using live-tweeting as a class assignment forces students to lean-in rather than remain passive. Based on the student feedback, they enjoyed the engagement and learning this assignment prompted. In fact, they appreciated the assignment so much that they wanted to do more. The authors were surprised some students begged for

more live-tweeting and suggested more tweets and more viewing time should be required for an event than the minimums used in class.

The second question asked what students would learn from live-tweeting. According to the students, they learned how to be professional online, how to use Twitter effectively, how to write quickly and concisely, and how to multi-task. Several students mentioned learning professionalism, and this result ties to other social media research findings; Bor (2014) also found the need for training students to be professional in their posts. Although her class research focused on Facebook instead of Twitter, she also discovered that students' "experience using social media for personal use did not fully prepare them to use this platform for professional purposes" (Bor, 2014, p. 250). The results related to concise writing also tie to the literature mentioned earlier; as Kurtz (2009) stated, the character limit "provides a real and powerful way, and need, to teach word choice, ideas, and punctuation. Twitter also creates an authentic requirement to consider the needs and background of our audience" (p. 1). These are perfect lessons to pull into the public relations classroom.

The third research question asked what the best practices would be for live-tweeting in a communication course. The authors have discovered over the course of a year and a half that researching an event or speaker beforehand helps students to be better prepared for the event. This research includes finding hashtags ahead of time that students can watch for during the event. They also learned that a practice run using a video clip from a similar event can help students feel more confident during the actual live-tweeting experience.

While seven of the 24 agricultural communication students reported wanting to work in PR, the reception of new media, in general, has not been as strong yet as those majoring in advertising/public relations. Live-tweeting was no different. Overall, the agricultural communication

students did not yet see the connection of tweeting to their career.

One of the favorite aspects of the assignment reported by students was reading what others were tweeting. This observation of others' posts ties into Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory – that people learn from what they see others doing, whether those models are present or in a mediated form, and that the viewer has the agency to decide whether or not to imitate the model. While most Bandura-related research has focused on television as that mediated channel of delivery, why not consider social media as channels for learning through observation, too? One of the authors asks students to follow major names from their fields of interest on Twitter and to observe what those professionals post and retweet. Students are encouraged to try to tweet information that those influencers would likely tweet or want to retweet. Thus, they are trained to imitate what they see done by others in their social media environments. This also circles back to Weick's sensemaking theory and its idea, "How can I know who I am until I see what they do?" (p. 23).

CONCLUSION

Required live-tweeting is an effective assignment that can work in many public relations, or even general communication classes. For example, it could be adjusted to focus on wording in a writing class, promoting events for an event-planning class, using hashtags strategically for a campaigns class, monitoring for a research class, or learning about the technology behind it all for a new media class. Live-tweeting gives students a chance to practice a skill they may need when they graduate.

Like Hsu and Ching (2012) found with their Twitter research, the student participants in this project reported an increased sense of community after live-tweeting the same events with each other. Although they sat together in class, it was the tweeting assignments that gave them a chance to interact on a more personal level.

This research ties into Weick's (1995) sense-making theory so well because of the social basis of Twitter, the opportunity to create a profile that presents a particular identity, the thought process that goes into creating a post, the plethora of cues surrounding each user as he/she tweets, and the ongoing nature of live-tweeting. According to Weick (1995), those interactions with classmates, as well as strangers, and the environment within their Twitter feeds impacted (and were impacted by) students' identities. The aspect of "which self is appropriate" (Weick, 1995, p. 20) clearly connects with the concept of considering their audience and communicating professionally. Students reported enjoying seeing the tweets by others; reading those tweets by others would inevitably influence their own sensemaking of the situation ("the social property of sensemaking" per Soffe et al., 2011, p. 219). Students watching what other people tweeted may also tie to Social Cognitive Theory, as they learned from watching. Viewing a demonstration of tweets in their feed filled by posts from professionals in their preferred field may have made them more confident over time as they learned what was appropriate.

So many students referenced thinking on their feet and being challenged to write something interesting and useful in a limited space. These challenges prompted critical thinking, which is one of the most sought-after outcomes in higher education.

Based on the feedback received in the surveys, students learned how to work quickly in a live-tweeting situation, how to communicate professionally on Twitter, how to overcome challenges, how to use Twitter effectively, and how to be concise. Their favorite aspect of live-tweeting was seeing what other people tweeted and interacting with other tweeters. They found gaining familiarity with Twitter to be one of the most helpful results of using the microblogging site for class. They also found it helpful that Twitter use for class helped keep them up to date, helped prepare them for their careers, and connected them

with others. They also had to concentrate as they had to "think on the fly."

The best practices for using live-tweeting in the public relations/communication curriculum appear to be clear communication of expectations, examples of effective tweets, research ahead of time as to hashtags and people/organizations involved, numerous events for students to choose from, and holding a practice session using a video clip with practice tweets written or typed rather than tweeted publicly.

Limitations

This research project involved students at one university, resulting in a small sample; however, multiple classes, majors and backgrounds comprised the sample. Another limitation is that the results are based on self-reported learning. Based on the feedback, one of the limitations of the assignment in several students' minds was the challenge of not having a television; however, there are television sets in common areas in several places on campus and in nearby restaurants. The issue of not having cable television was mitigated in that the professors only assigned live-tweeting for events that were on broadcast television or were free to attend on campus. The professors also shared links for programs that were available online.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies could formally analyze the tweets of the live-tweeters for evidence of critical thinking. Other studies could broaden the feedback beyond one university by instituting the assignment in other universities and following up with feedback surveys.

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APPENDIX A

Survey Questions

Are you male or female?

- Male
- Female

What career/field are you hoping to pursue?

- Advertising
- Film
- Journalism
- Marketing
- Music
- Public Relations
- Radio
- Sales
- TV news production
- Other _____

What is your major?

- Communication Studies - Corporate Communication
- Communication Studies - Grad Prep
- Communication Studies - Speech Performance
- MCOM - Ad/PR
- MCOM - Broadcast Journalism
- MCOM - Broadcasting/Electronic Media
- Ag Comm
- Marketing
- Communication
- Other _____

What is your classification?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate Student

What skills did live tweeting help you with (if any)? (check any that apply)

- Writing
- Being concise
- Networking
- Branding myself
- Editing
- Thinking on my feet
- Other: _____

On a scale of 0-10 (0 = not at all, 10 = very beneficial), how beneficial was the use of Twitter in our class?

On a scale of 0-10, how beneficial was live tweeting to your career goals?

What was the most helpful aspect of our use of Twitter in class?

What would you suggest we do differently with future classes (in relation to live tweeting)?

What was your favorite part of live tweeting?

What did you learn from live tweeting?

APPENDIX B

Sample Rubric from a Writing Course

Tweet at least three times during a game, a news conference, or a sportscast across at least 30 minutes. Tweets must include the class hashtag. Try to share interesting information and engage with other users. The game schedule can be found at <http://www.ncaa.com/marchmadness>

There are some groups you may want to begin following to prepare for this assignment such as @marchmadness or the schools you are interested in following. You may also use public relations, advertising or community-connected content for this assignment.

Finally, here are a few additional reminders about live-tweeting events.
<https://media.twitter.com/best-practice/tweet-in-the-moment>

	Tweet 1	Tweet 2	Tweet 3
Hashtags (2 pts)			
Helpful / Interesting (6 pts.)			
Well written (2 pts)			

Total =

APPENDIX C

Sample Rubric from New Media Course Super Bowl Live Tweeting Assignment

Tweet at least five times during the game across at least 30 minutes. Tweets must include the class hashtag (#_____). Try to share interesting information and engage with other users. Try to include an image or a helpful link. You can include (or just follow) other relevant hashtags like #BrandBowl, #AdBowl, #RTM, #SB2015, #SBXLIX, #Seahawks, #Patriots, etc.

Pay attention to how companies are using hashtags and incorporating new media into their promotions. In 2014, 54 percent of the ads involved a hashtag and 75 percent of those this year are expected to do so, but it won't be limited to ads (Jones, 2014). Look at how the network and the NFL are using them, too, during the program (as well as before and after).

Jones, R. (2014, Dec. 16). 13 social marketing predictions for 2015.

Retrieved from <http://www.engagesciences.com/13-social-marketing-predictions-2015/>

	Tweet 1	Tweet 2	Tweet 3	Tweet 4	Tweet 5
Present (10 pts)					
Helpful / Interesting (10 pts.)					

Total =